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# Morphosyntactic Analysis of Marma Language

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## ABSTRACT

*This research article is aimed to give an idea to those researchers especially young linguists who have fascination to analyse indigenous languages mainly Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) languages. Because in Bangladesh we do not have enough examples of this kind of research from which we can get a clear concept about linguistic research in Bangladesh. We hope this work will encourage and help them how to analyze a language morphosyntactically. In this study, we have used many examples to make clear concepts of Marma's morphology and syntactic relation.*

**Keywords:** Morphosyntax, Marma, Indigenous, Language family, Pronominal system, Case marker, Language death.

## METHODOLOGY

Primary and secondary sources have been used in this research. To conduct this research, especially for collecting field level data we focused on quantity method. We have extensively examined the available books, gazette, records, internet and other documents which are related to indigenous language issue. To primary information especially for collecting field level data, we visited Bandarban, because most of CHT communities are living there. We had an extensive discussion with the key informants of the Marma community. Besides, we have had the opportunity to take face-to-face informal interviews.

## INTRODUCTION

Marmas are one of the prominent indigenous communities in Bangladesh. They are the second largest ethnic minority group in our country. Most of the Marmas live in the three hill districts of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari. Some Marmas, however, live in the coastal districts of Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali. These Marmas name them Rakhain and many consider them as a separate ethnic community.<sup>1</sup> These tribal people live in the hill forests with primitive social and administrative system with separate ethnic and age-old tradition, customs, culture and beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

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## ORIGIN

Anthropologically Marmas are said to be the descendents of the Proto Mongoloid race. Like other people with Mongolian characteristics, Marma's tend to have yellow complexion, black hairs, straight, small eyes, snub nose, a wide face with such features and a fold of skin known as the epicanthic fold that covers the inner corner of the eye and gives it an almond shaped appearance. Their names for themselves are already suggestive of their connection to Arakan and Burma: 'Marma' like 'Burma' can be traced back to the old designation, 'Marma' which the Burmese used for themselves.<sup>3</sup> In older sources the Marma are referred to as 'Mogh' (also written 'Magh') a pejorative term still used today by Bangalis. In the most ancient sources on Chittagong and Arakan, however the use appears to be mixed with a certain amount of fear and respect Mogh is probably to be derived from the same Persian source as our word 'Magician' and in our context, denoted the infidels of Buddhist creed. It is very difficult to say that from where the word 'Mogh' derives. The educated people refuse to give their identity as a 'Mogh'. Rather they feel prestige has to show their identity as Brumes on Arakani. There is not any Mogh race in Arakani or Barmis.<sup>4</sup> To state that all Marma came from Arakan, however, is not to say that all contemporary Marmas are indeed descendants of the erstwhile rulers of the Chittagong plains-even if the Raja of the Marma in the Southern Hill Tracts; the so-called 'Bohmang (field marshal) may claim to have descended from the brother-in-law of the former king of Arakan. It is notable that this brother-in-law incidentally was not a Marma but a descendant of the non-dynasty of Pegu in lower Marma; and he was appointed governor of Chittagong by the king. The people of Pegu were known as Talaingor Tai Luang, meaning 'greater tai', a branch of the great Tai race which according to some historians, lived in southern and central China as early as 200BC. They have another important and distinct history, which is very significant for their identification. Many historians remark that most of the fore features of the Marma moved out of Arakan as that kingdom declined and it was in 1784 incorporated into the Burmese empire that is during a time where the East Indian Company had already taken over the administration of the Chittagong region (1766). Repeated but futile attempts to throw off the yoke of the new Burmese rule bother more and more refugees in to the English controlled area. One Marma group migrated from a tributary of the Koladan in Arakan; after intermediate stops on the matanuri and in the low hill of the plains north of Chittagong, it reached its present place of resident in the northern part of the Hill Tracts around 1830. Marma however also lived on the southern Chittagong plains: in Cox's Bazar and its background. There are the newcomer Bangalis; and since the end of the colonial period, more and more Marma have relinquished their professions to these newcomers and sought protection and security once again in Arakan and Burma. This distribution corresponds to the spheres of influence of the Trippera and Chakma prior to the massive influence of the Marma that is roughly in the seventeenth century. The reason is that Mru may well have already moved into the Southern Chittagong hills, while Dengnak may have migrated



into Arakan, such early relationships between the two ethnic groups would help to explain the existence of an isolated Mru village which located in the middle of the Dengnak in the Chakma Circle, still preserved and exceedingly large number of old traditions. It is not at all impossible, however that Mru were also absorbed into the Dengnak through the two cultures today have little in common. Most of the Marma came under Bengali influence, but in the south of the Chittagong Hill region where their culture remain comparatively pure, the script and stress are Burmese and the language as Arakanese dialect.<sup>5</sup>

## POPULATION

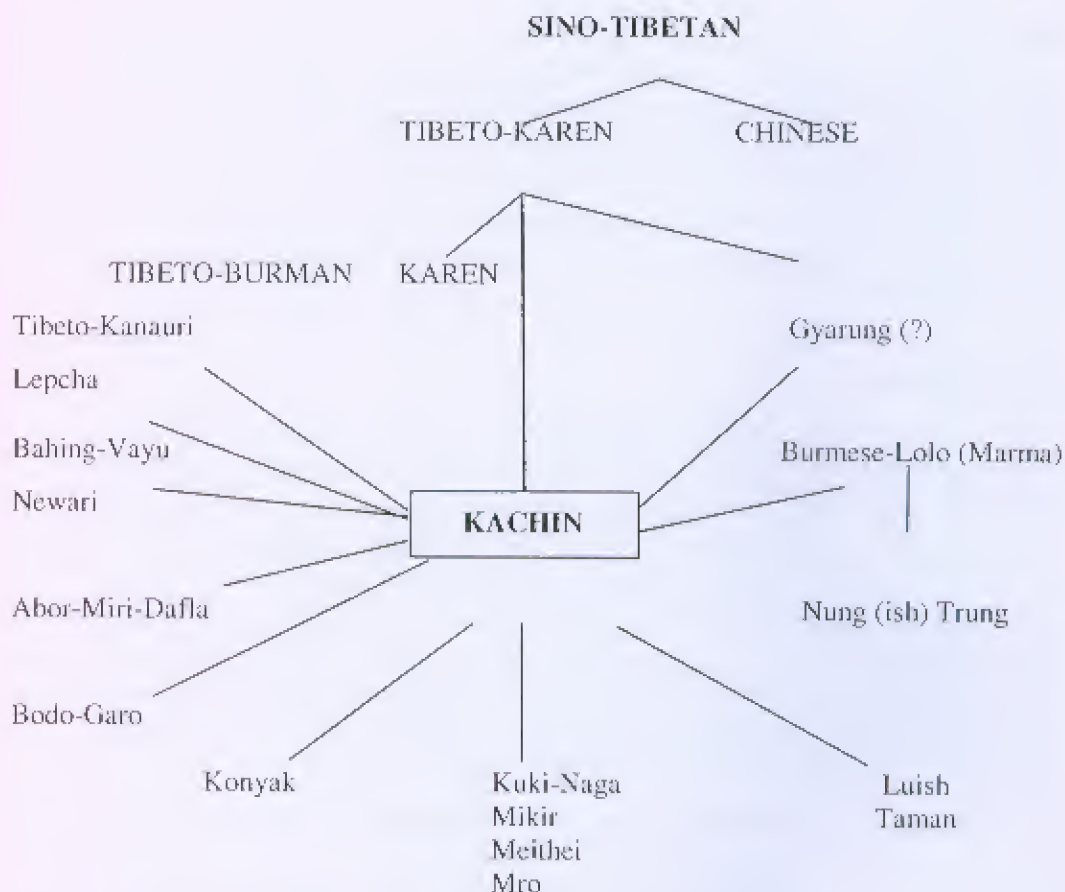
Amongst the primitive dwellers of Bangladesh, one of the most prominent indigenous tribes (ethnic minority) is Marma. They mainly populate in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari including the coastal district of Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali. They can be distinguished from other of neighboring primitive inhabitation by a number of distinctive features. They are distinct in their language and behavior, which exhibit marked disparity from others based on population decline. It can be said that the Marma language is its path to extinction. In the part hundred and fifty years, their population has dissipated by half resulting in the inclusion of the Khumi language in the list of endangered languages. The gradual decline of the Marma population in Bangladesh is clearly exemplified in the table beneath:

Year	Population
1901	35,000
1956	80,000
1981	1, 20,000

According to the 1991 census, the number of Marmas in Bangladesh is 1, 57,301. The Marma numbered approximately 2,10,000 in the late 20th century.<sup>6</sup>

## LANGUAGE FAMILY

Marmas belong to the Mongoloid race. The word Marma originates from the Burmese word Myanma that means Burmese nationals and is pronounced as Marma by the people of the CHT. The Bengali and the English know them as Mug from the British dynasty. They do not like this name at all. It is remarkable that the language of the Marma people constitutes a faction of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is devoid of its own orthographic representation. The evolution of the Marma language can be shown with a diagram



Latham said about this 'East of Chittagong lies the j o country; the language of which is neither more or less than a rude dialect of the ordinary Burmese; the population being Burmese also.'<sup>7</sup> Although other tribes have progressed due to contact with contemporary civilization, the Marma have retained strong elements of their original relation identity and continue to live according to their traditional 'folk ways' G. A Grierson wrote about that; it is written in an alphabet which allowing for its cursive form is almost identical with the Khmer character, which was formerly used in the southern parts of Burma.<sup>8</sup>

## MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

### 1. Constituent order

The Constituent orders in Marma language are SOV and SVO. Examples are given below-

Teacher afraid the sank

*-kiɔŋc<sup>h</sup>ra jamringo krɔ lɛ*

*s*

*o*

*v*

- a) Teacher was afraid the sank

*-kiəŋcʰra jamringo kro lire*

*s                      o                      v*

- b) JRM called SPC

*-muu suç gokʰo lire*

*s                      o                      v*

- c) The fan moves round

*-dæjeʔca wajgroʔ paj te / lere*

*s                                      v                      o*

Here *ca* is an article and *te/ler* is used as a suffix. *wajgroʔ* is a verb

## 2. Grammatical Categories

**Tense:** In Marma language, Tense is a very important factor. In Marma language, we have three markers after the main verb. Like that in Marma language, we have *lte* for Present tense, *lire* for past tense and *hoʔ / pʰoʔ* for Future tense. Examples-

- a) Teacher afraid the sank

*-kiəŋcʰra jamringo kro lte*

*yere lte* is a Present tense marker

- b) JRM called SPC

*-muu suç gokʰo lire*

Here *lire* is a Past tense marker

- c) Tell him to go there quickly

*-jaθugo jodɔʔ apraŋ lapʰoʔ*

*yere pʰoʔ* is a Future tense marker

- d) Tell him to go there quickly

*-jaθugo jodɔʔ coʔ coʔ lahoʔ*

*yere hoʔ* is a Future tense marker

## 3. Adpositional phrases (prepositional and post positions)

The term adposition is a covert term for prepositions and post preposition. There are usually particles; through they may have be clitics or substantives, nouns or verbs that say something about the semantic role of an adjacent noun phrase in the clause.<sup>9</sup> Marma has such kinds of adpositional phrases. e.g.

- a) The bag is on the table

*-ba-ca tebil a 't<sup>h</sup>a ga*

*or*

*-ro<sup>o</sup>oica tebil a 't<sup>h</sup>a ga*

*yere a 't<sup>h</sup>a* (on) is a Preposition

- b) The bag is under the table

*-ba-ca tebil o<sup>o</sup>ga higre*

*or*

*-ro<sup>o</sup>oica tebil o<sup>o</sup>ga higre*

here *o<sup>o</sup>ga* (under) is a Preposition

#### 4. Comparatives

A comparative is a construction in which two items are compared according to same quality. Marma Language expresses comparison by simply juxtaposing two clauses expressing the degree to which the compared entities exhibit the quality in question. Such as-

- a) SPC's girlfriend is more beautiful then JRM girlfriend.

*-fvc ma ap<sup>h</sup>a<sup>o</sup>thama? jku ma ap<sup>h</sup>a<sup>o</sup>thama? f<sup>h</sup>a<sup>o</sup> fare*

*yere f<sup>h</sup>an* is a Comparative marker and '*ma*' is used in a possessive case.

- b) SPC is taller then JRM

*- fvc jku f<sup>h</sup>a<sup>o</sup> yere*

*yere f<sup>h</sup>a<sup>o</sup>* is a Comparative marker.

#### 5. Pronominal system

The pronominal system in Marma Language is given below:

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
First person	<i>ya</i>	<i>yorogo</i>
Second person	<i>naŋ</i>	<i>naŋro</i>
Third person	<i>jaθu</i>	<i>jaθuro</i>

#### Example

- a) I am looking for a job

*- ya olo tək<sup>h</sup>u faro<sup>o</sup>*



Here *ɣaɪs* is a First person singular

- b) Tell us how escaped

- *ɣaɣ moʃoŋro pjaŋro rwele ɣorogo pro*

Here *ɣaɣ* is a Second person singular and *ɣorogo* First person plural.

- c) He ate rice very quickly

- *jaθu kəŋgəŋ apraŋ iʔoməŋ calire*

Here *jaθu* is a Third person singular

- d) How will they come?

- *jaθuro meʃəŋ pjaŋro lahple*

Here *jaθuro* is a Third person plural

- e) What time will they come?

- *jaθuro jaək<sup>h</sup>ma lahole*

Here *jaθuro* is a Third person plural

## 6. Demonstratives

Probably all language have a clear class of demonstratives. These are normally free forms and may proceed or follow the nouns they function with Demonstrative may also be anaphoric on their own, as in *what is that?* In which case they may be termed demonstrative pronouns. Demonstratives imply 'pointing to' or 'demonstrating' the object they refer. In Marma Language, we have such kind of demonstrative pronouns.

- a) This pen writes well

- *de koloŋnaʔ ruihoʔ kəyre*

Here *de* is a demonstrative pronoun

- b) That cow gives us milk.

- *ja noa ɣroʔgo kopire*

Here *ja* is a demonstrative pronoun

- c) That cow gives this milk

- *ja noa de nopive*

Here *ja* is demonstrative pronoun

## 7. Adverbs

- a) Tell him to go there quickly.



*-prələj jaθugo jəɖə? aprəj lapʰo?*

Here *apraŋ* is adverb and *go* is accusative

Do they work slowly.

*-ələ? ca/go i:ro? lə?*

here *i:ro?* is adverb and *go/ca* is case marker

- b) Finally, he got the pig meat.

*-acʰuŋ ma jaθuro wəθago raʰlire*

Here *acʰuŋ* is adverb and *ma* is locative

- c) He ate rice very quickly.

*-jaθu kəŋgəŋ aprəj tʰəməŋ calire*

Here *apraŋ* is a adverb

- d) He speaks loudly.

*-jaθu a:na? cəga prəre*

Here *a:na?* is a adverb and *na* is instrumental marker

## 8. Clause combinations

Adverbial clauses are those that serve an 'adverbial' function. They modify a verb phrase or a whole clause. Sometimes adverbial clauses are termed 'adjuncts'. The kinds of information embodied in adverbial clause are the same kinds of information expressed by adverbs, time, place, manner, reasons, conditions etc. Examples will be provided in the following paragraphs. Most of these examples are from Marma language:

### 8.1 Conditional

- a) If you want, I will help you.

*-naŋ loŋe ŋakuho?*

or

*-naŋ lore coge ŋa kuh?*

- b) If SPC come, JRM will go.

*~fəʋ lage ŋəw laho?*

- c) If it does not rain, SPC will go to market.

*~mo m'kja cʰoge fəʋ jido*

or

*ˈmo m'kja cʰoge ʃvʃ ʃima laho?*

- d) If you eat 'pig' meat, you will be strong.

*-naŋ wɔ-θa-ca-ge kæŋ-ʃʰa ma aʃapʰo?*

- e) If you do not eat 'pig' meat, you will not fat.

*ˈnaŋ wɔ-θa-cá-ge 'wejŋ pʰa: m'ho?*

## 8.2 Reason

As he is sick, he has not come.

*ˈja θu narama mala li*

## 8.3 Location

He reached the boat in time

*ˈjaθu lɔŋma akʰiŋ am: rote*

## 8.4 Time

Come to our house within 5 minutes.

*ˈŋa mini (a ʃʰi:ʃ wɔŋ) ma ŋoro e:ŋ-ɔo lalæ*

## 8.5 Motion

The fan moves round

*-dæje? ca wajŋro? paj te/leɾe*

Here *ca* is an article and *te/leɾe* is used as a suffix. *wajŋro?* is a verb

## 9. The structure of Questions

**9.1 Yes/No question:** In Marma Language, we have got 1 1 to make a Y/N question. These kinds of examples are given below

- a) Are you ok?

*-maj? akɔŋ hiŋlɔ*

- b) Do you eat 'pig' meat?

*ˈnaŋ wɔθa calɔ*

- c) Are you ill?

*ˈmaj? kʰiŋʰa məkɔŋlɔ*

- d) Are you sleeping?

*ˈmaj? oiluŋblɔ / maj? oirɔlɔ*

- e) Does SPC have a girlfriend?

*-fʊç ma ap<sup>h</sup>aθma? hiŋlɔ*

f) Do you know JRM?

*-naŋ ɲɯu go θiʔlɔ?*

g) Does he know you?

*-ja θu nkoθʔlɔ*

h) Do you love David's country?

*-maj david roprego k<sup>h</sup>iɔjlɔ*

i) Do you love your country?

*-maj koprego k<sup>h</sup>iɔjlɔ*

j) Does he drink wine?

*-jaθu ara? θɔlɔ*

k) Do you know Lalung?

*-maj lelunŋo θilɔ*

## 9.2 Informational question

In Marma Language, we have 1. to make informational question. Examples-

a) What do you want?

*-majʔ taloʔle*

b) Who is your teacher?

*-majʔ c<sup>h</sup>'ra aθul*

c) How many brother and sister you have?

*-na:ma ɲjaɔʔ mɔŋn'ɲa? hiŋle*

d) Where are you from?

*-majʔ j'ga lale (m)*

*-naŋ j'ga lɔle (f)*

e) What is you name?

*-naʔ name fale (f)*

*-majʔ name fale (m)*

## 10. Exclamatory sentence

How beautiful the flower is!

*-de paɪŋ hwaʔŋ ca kɔŋgɔŋ larega*

Here *ga* is used in exclamatory marker.

## 11. Case marker

Case is very important for hill tracts languages. Such as Marma language-

### 11.1 Noun marker

*˜ga* = accusative or goal in definite

Ex: Who do you like? *-mja aθuŋo kɔʔ(p) joŋe*

*˜ma* = locative

Ex: Who is your best friend? *majʔma raŋŋjŋ mujɕʰɪj aθule*

*˜dɔʔ* = ablative (motion to wards)

*˜gaʔ* = ablative (motion away)

Ex: where are you from? *-majʔ j'ga laŋe*

*˜naʔ* = instrumental commutative

Ex: He speaks loudly. *-jaθu amaʔ ceŋa pɔɔe*

*˜ma* = possessive

Ex: SPC's girlfriend is more beautiful than JRM girl friend.

*-ʃɪɕma apʰaʔθamaʔ ɲɪɪuma apʰaʔθamaʔ ʔʰaʔ ʔare*

### 11.2 Numeral classifier

*˜jaʔ* = people

*˜luŋ* = something inside or round things

*˜kʰjɔŋ* = long thin things

*˜kʰja* = hours

*˜pʰaʔ* = things in pair

*˜gɔŋ* = animals

*˜kʰuʔ* = genera

### Examples

*θwo eyes [mjaciʔ najpʰaʔ]*

*θhree horses [m'raŋθuŋgɔŋ]*



*θhree eggs* [u? θuη luη]

*ηive eggs* [u? ηa luη]

*θhree cows* [nuwa θuηguη]

*ηive cows* [nuwa ηa:guη]

*θhree rivers* [kʰjuη θuηkʰjuη]

*ηive rivers* [θuη kʰjuη]

*θhree sticks* [ɾəkʰ jojθuη kʰjuη]

*ηive sticks* [ɾəkʰ jojya: kʰjuη]

### 11.3 Verb marker

#### 11.3.1 Prefix

<sup>~</sup>m? = Negative

Ex: If it does not rain, SPC will go to market

-mo m?kja cʰoge fuɾ fima laho?

<sup>~</sup>li/lirɛ = Past tense

Ex: Finally, he got the pig meat.

-acʰuη ma jaθuro woθago ra? lire

<sup>~</sup>hoʔ/pʰoʔ = Future tense

Ex: Tell him to go there quickly

-jaθugo jodoʔ coʔ coʔ laho?

-ro = Progressive

<sup>~</sup>tunb = progressive

<sup>~</sup>bja: = state

-kʰa = perfect

-kʰe = simple past

-ηujη = potential

#### 11.3.2 Clause/Sentence level

<sup>~</sup>le = informational question

Ex: How many brother and sister do you have?

<sup>~</sup>na:ma ηjajoʔ moηη 'ηaʔ hiηle

$\sim re$  = Affirmative statement

Ex: SPC is taller than JRM

*-ʃvɛ ɲɔu ʃaʔ ʒere*

$\sim lo$  = Y/N question marker

Ex: Do you love your country?

*-maj koprego kʰiojlo*

$\sim ga$  = Exclamatory

Ex: How beautiful the flower is!

*-de paɪŋ bwɔʔŋ ca kəŋŋəŋ larega*

## 12. Other's marker

*dɛ*= proximal demonstrative

Ex: The tree is big.

*- de apəŋ ca krɪre*

*ja*= distal demonstrative

Ex: That cow gives us milk.

*-ja noa ŋroʔgo hopɪre*

*roʔ* = subordinate clause marker

Ex: I am looking for a job.

*- ŋa ɔlo təkʰu ʒaroʔ*

*ge* = conditional process (-recʰoge)

Ex: If you want I will help you

$\sim naŋloge ŋa kuho$

## CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is a home to more than 30 ethnic minority communities and most of them numbering two to three million speak their own language. The most important languages are Chakma, Garo, Marma, Manipuri and Oraon. Only Chakma and Marma have their own scripts. The songs, fables, rhymes, proverbs and riddles are a part of a language and a purveyor of a people culture. The Marma language and Marma people are now in an extinct position. The mother language of Marma ethnic minority of the country is a timely reminder that they have a rightful place in our polyglot nationality. It was observed with concern that the ongoing march of globalization may swallow the

linguistic identities of many peoples and a kind of language imperialism may hold sway. Now steps should be taken to introduce a policy regarding the existence of these languages. We should bear in mind that preservation of a Marma language becomes difficult if the number of its speakers is very small and its character is close to a mainstream language. According to ethnologists, a Christian language service, which aims to present the Bible in every language spoken in the world, there, are currently 6912 living languages in the world. However, a precise tally is difficult because languages are becoming extinct all the time. As an example, we may refer that the Cornish language does not have a single speaker living now. English, Spanish, and Portuguese have in course of time superseded many Native American languages. When a language dies much else dies with it the experiences distinctive communicative style and tradition of many generations of a linguistic community. It leaves humanity diminished. Hence, the question comes of special effort and state patronage for preservation. These suggestions are also applicable for Marma language. If this continues, the languages of the Marma ethnic minority in Bangladesh will be changed from its origin. There can be no doubt that the adoption of a language other than the ancestral one by an ethnic group will lead to the genesis of a new variety of the adopted language. This variety will influence not only by structural elements of transfer from the ethnic group's original mother language such as pronunciation and syntax but indeed also lexical items expressing ethnic characteristics of the group.<sup>10</sup> Linguistically this problem is called 'Language death' which is at present the main concern for all ethnic minorities in Bangladesh especially for Marma.

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